

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5761
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 9314

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 3)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR EG IS US
SUBJECT: SPECULATION THAT USG TAKES SADAT FOR GRANTED

1. NASSERIST LEADER MUHAMMAD HASANAYN HAYKAL IS, WE UNDERSTAND, SPREADING STORY THAT THANKS TO SADAT'S ALL-THE-CARDS-ON-THE-TABLE NEGOTIATING STYLE, USG BELIEVES IT HAS GOE IN ITS POCKET AND, THEREFORE, REGARDS ASAD AS THE KEY FIGURE ON THE ARAB SIDE OF PRESENT ME DIPLOMACY.

2. THIS LINE OF ARGUMENT IS INCREASINGLY HEARD AND ACCEPTED BY MANY DIPLOMATS AND JOURNALISTS IN CAIRO, TO THE POINT THAT FAHMY'S OUTBURST OF IRRITATION OVER "SLOWNESS" US PEACE EFFORTS IN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED MAY 27 (CAIRO 8969), WAS WIDELY INTERPRETED LOCALLY AS REACTION TO ALLEGED US PENCHANT TAKE GOE FOR GRANTED. FAHMY CONTINUES CARP OVER WHAT HE CALLS US "INFATUATION" WITH ASAD, WHICH HE CHARGES IS HARMFUL TO SADAT'S IMAGE AND POSITION AT HOME AND IN THE ARAB WORLD.

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3. NEW WRINKLE TO THIS SERIES OF SPECULATIONS HAS RECENTLY EMERGED. WE ARE HEARING THAT ISRAELIS ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE PLANTED ALLEGATION THAT IN US EYES ASAD HAS HAS USURPED SADAT'S CENTRAL POSITION. FOR EXAMPLE, AN AMCIT JOURNALIST LONG BASED IN ISRAEL, ASKED EMBOFF LAST WEEK WHY USG HAS CONCLUDED EGYPT LESS IMPORTANT THAN SMALLER, WEAKER SYRIA. WHEN EMBOFF ASKED HOW HE HAD COME TO THIS CONCLUSION, JOURNALIST REPLIED IT WAS

VIEW OF UNNAMED OFFICIALS IN ISRAEL. WE HAVE HEARD ALLEGATION THAT ISRAELI EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON AND ISRAELI MISSION IN NEW YORK ARE PEDDLING SIMILAR LINE.

4. WILD SPECULATION AND RUMOR-MONGERING ARE ENDEMIC IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD, BUT WE BELIEVE ABOVE NEEDS BE FLAGGED FOR DEPT'S ATTENTION. IF IT REACHES SADAT, HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE UPSET. SADAT AND OTHERS VIEW ISSUE IN CONTEXT OF ENDEMIC SYRIAN/EGYPTIAN RIVALRY FOR ME LEADERSHIP (SEPTEL AND HIS PREVIOUS SUSPICIONS OF A USG TILT TOWARD ASAD WILL BE REVIVED.

5. WHAT SHOULD CONCERN US IS THAT IF SUCH RUMORS BEGIN TO BE BELIEVED AT HIGH GOE LEVELS, AND THEY WILL BE UNLESS REDRESSIVE ACTION TAKEN, SADAT'S CAPABILITY TO INFLUENCE ARAB AND EGYPTIAN OPINION TOWARD NEEDED, NOT ALWAYS PALATABLE, CONCESSIONS COULD BE SERIOUSLY DAMAGED. UNLESS WE HAVE CONCLUDED SADAT IS NO LONGER ABLE PLAY PRINCIPAL ROLE IN ME PEACE EFFORT, WE THINK IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO TAKE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC OCCASIONS TO REAFFIRM OUR WELL KNOWN VIEW THAT SADAT WILL PLAY KEY, IF NOT PREEMINENT, ARAB ROLE IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, IN EGYPTIAN EYES A CONTEST IS IN FACT DEVELOPING OVER PRESIDENT CARTER'S PUBLIC AFFIRMATIONS OF THE RESPECTIVE ROLES OF SADAT AND ASAD. RECENT EGYPTIAN EFFORTS PUBLICLY CAST OUR REPORTS ON ARAB LEADERS VISITS TO WASHINGTON AS MESSAGES FROM PRESIDENT CARTER TO PRESIDENT SADAT MUST BE READ PARTLY IN THIS LIGHT.

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